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Ó Domhnaill Abú

IN HOC SIGNO VINCES

O Donnell Clan Newsletter No. 20

Spring 1993

Preparing the roof timbers for Donegal Castle.

Four O'Donnells from 'Beautiful Mayo'

In May of 1816 John and Richard O'Donnell from Co. Mayo joined the British Army. They were, then, in their early twenties. Two years later their regiment set sail for Canada. By summer of 1819 they found themselves in Upper Canada(now Ontario) where they spent the next ten years quelling any resurgence which followed the war of 1812.

Richard's wife, Mary Regan, came to Canada with the regiment and lived with her husband wherever he was posted. This was not common at the time. Two of their children are known to have been born in such camps. Wives and children, if they did accompany their husbands, had to share a one-roomed wooden building with other soldiers and exist on half rations. However, it was possible for women to earn money by doing laundry and sewing for the officers and at some camps it was even possible to grow their own crops.

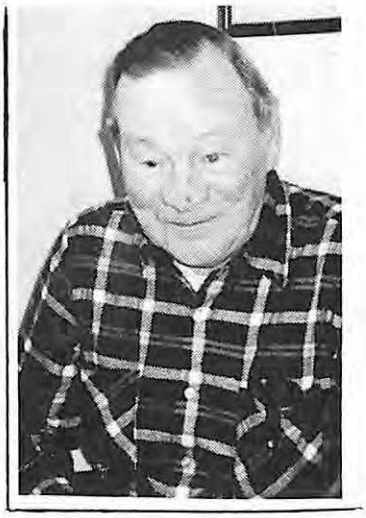
John returned to Ireland in 1830 and was discharged due to a leg injury. The following year he married Margaret Joyce in Castlebar and, shortly after, both emigrated to Canada, arriving there on the 12th July 1831. By 1832 they were living in Niagara while Richard and his family resided in Ottawa.

At this time it was British policy to settle Upper Canada with the 'right sort of people' by giving discharged soldiers a hundred acres of land to farm. Both Richard and John availed of the offer and in 1832 received their hundred acre plots in the township of Gwillimbury, Simcoe County, some 60 miles north of Toronto.

However, much of the land was swamp and not very suitable for farming. In addition, this land had recently been taken from its inhabitants, the Ojibway Indians, from whom the new settlers often had to defend themselves. Where the land wasn't swampy it was virgin forest which required alot of hard work before planting could commence. Added to this was the task of building a suitable shelter before the onset of winter.

Soon, they encountered the difficulties caused by the long harsh winter; crops planted too early could be destroyed by late spring frosts while crops planted too late could be destroyed by late summer frosts. Yet, John prospered. Soon he invited his younger brother, Anthony, then living in Ireland, to join him. Anthony did and soon he and his wife, Mary Rowan of Castlebar, settled on the south-east half of John's farm. In 1846 Anthony bought that 50 acres from John and both families lived side by side.

Richard's progress was much similar to John's. In the mid 1800's he had a Roger O'Donnell from Castlebar and his wife Bridget Tunny along with four children arrive with him. Exactly where they lived is not clear, perhaps they had some arrangement similar to John and Anthony's.



Mattew O'Donnell, John's great-grandson. Last O'Donnell to live in W. Gwillimbury.

So by the mid 1800's we find four O'Donnell families living in West Gwillimbury, all from the Castlebar area of Co. Mayo. Records show they served as witnesses to each other's marriages, and sponsors at the baptism of each other's children but they didn't intermarry which may indicate the possibility of all being closely related.

Later on, other Castlebar families settled in the area - Thomas and Nancy(Hollaran) Gibbons with two sons, McNallys and Dillions, all of whom intermarried with the O'Donnells until a small Mayo community developed there, a community which carried on the music, songs and traditions of their former home. Finally, many of those pioneers found their last earthly home in the Holy Martyers Cemetery outside Bradford, Ontario. On John's tombstone is the following inscription -

"Farewell friends and children dear,
I am not dead but sleeping here.
Short was my stay; long my rest,
God called me home; He thought it best."

Today their descendants are to be found in many parts of Canada and in all walks of life, but wherever they are, come St. Patrick's Day, they are all as Irish as their ancestors who left their homeland, 'Beautiful Mayo', almost two centuries ago.

Condensed from an article sent to me by Nancy the wife of John, great-grandson of Anthony and Mary. V.O'Donnell.

Fr. William O'Donnell - 'The Waterloo Priest'

In Clonmany Graveyard is the grave of the Gaelic poet Donnchadh O'Donnell (1700-'78). Donnchadh's brother, Dean Conn O'Donnell P.P. had Carn Church built in 1787. He was buried in Fahan in 1795. In the same grave was buried another brother, Patrick O'Donnell (1704-'71). The latter's family included two more distinguished sons - Bishop Charles O'Donnell and his brother Owen. Owen with his wife, Margaret McDavitt, are buried in the family plot in Cockhill Old Graveyard, Buncrana. Their family included three priests - Fr. Charles(1778-1817), Fr. William, 'The Waterloo Priest'(1779-1856), and Fr. Denis(1783-1817). All three are buried with their parents. One flat stone is inscribed to the memory of Fr. Charles and Fr. Denis both of whom died the same fateful year of the typhus epidemic - 1817. A tall tombstone by itself bares the long epitaph to the third priest-brother, 'The Waterloo Priest', who outlived the other two by almost forty years.

William O'Donnell was born in 1779 and grew up in Inishowen. He received his early schooling from Tom McColgan a well-known classical teacher and in 1802 entered Maynooth Seminary. Although he finished his course in philosophy and theology, he did not take Holy Orders but instead took a commission in the British Army in 1811.

He served throughout the Peninsular War against Napoleon, was Aide-de-Camp to General Ross before the Battle of Pamplona in 1815 and personal adviser to Wellington himself. A war medal presented to Lieutenant William O'Donnell commemorates the two great victories of Vittoria and Pyrenees by which the French were driven out of the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, the same campaign was a very bloody affair and William was one of the very few surviving officers. According to French reports of the time, his regiment, the 20th Foot, was almost totally annihilated.

Another report tells us that after the Battle of Pamplona he was complimented by his commander and congratulated by his fellow officers, "upon having so narrowly escaped the death-dealing French bullets which carried off a portion of his garments....."

Lieut. O'Donnell served in many other actions as well culminating in the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, 18th June 1815 where an estimated 45,000 lost their lives.

Three years later, after the death of his two priest-brothers, Fathers Charles and Denis, this veteran of the battle-fields of Europe was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Derry. He administered his pastoral duties in Inishowen where he fought another campaign to defeat the unjust tithe system which overburdened the people. For his own refusal to pay this unfair tax he was imprisoned in Lifford Gaol in 1838. His release and return to Inishowen turned out to be a triumphant march with crowds of people turning out to cheer and accompany him along the way. Now, he was a hero of the Tithe War!

Nor did he neglect his duties as Parish Priest. He did much improvement to church buildings, was a strong advocate of temperance and had five schools built in his parish for the education of the catholic youth.

According to tradition, he rode a white horse all his priestly life, was a fine, erect figure, a master of every situation, his courage was manifested in difficult times, especially during the Famine years of 1845 - '48. Here's the last verse of a song - 'The Three O'Donnells' - popular in Inishowen.

"Here's a health to Father William boys,
Who fought at Waterloo,
He fought the French and Spaniards
Till he made the two subdue,
He fought them with his army
Till he could no longer stand:
He was once a bold lieutenant
But he's now our clergyman."

Father William O'Donnell, popularly known as 'The Waterloo Priest', died on the 10th Oct. 1856, aged 77.

Sources: "The Waterloo Priest" by J. Fitgerald, Donegal Annual 1977.
Derry Journal - 'The Waterloo Priest' by Wayfarer 4/4/'92.

1593

It is now 1993. Let's look back 400 years to 1593. It was now a year since Aodh Rua's escape. According to his biographer, Lughaidh O Clerigh, 'When he had settled in his princely seat and his chieftain's residence in Lifford (24th January, 1593), confronting his enemy, Turloch Luineach O Neill, he proceeded to wreak his vengeance and his enmity on him by driving him from his principality and weakening him, in the hope that Aodh O Neill might be inaugurated in his place. The foresight which he used proved of advantage to him, for the chieftaincy fell in the end to Aodh O Neill, and Turloch Luineach gave his consent and yielded to him as to the title that he should be styled O Neill. He was proclaimed after that and Turloch sent away the English who were with him, since he entered into agreement and friendship with O Domhnaill. In the month of May exactly, in the year of our Lord 1593, he did this.'

Already, we see no time being wasted by this nineteen-year old Chieftain of Clan Dalaigh in not alone putting his own house in order but also those of his neighbours in preparation for the coming struggle. All too often Aodh Rua has been described as being hot-headed, erratic, impulsive and imprudent, requiring the advice and guidance of the older, shrewder Hugh O'Neill. Lucius Emerson in the 1960 Donegal Annual argues, 'It is hard to understand why such qualities could be ascribed to one who could organise a system of defence and attack covering Sligo, Ballymote, Collooney, and Dunaveeragh, a system that eventually gave him the well-planned victory of the Curlews. His lightning raids into Connacht, Leinster, and Thomond had the speed and brilliance of an expert cavalry commander. His 'treating' with the Lord Deputy, his meeting with the commissioners at Agnoskye, the letters and envoys he and O'Neill sent to the King of Spain, his 'setting on the fence' when O'Neill and Bagenal defeated Maguire at Atha Cuil Uain (but three miles from where O'Donnell then was, at Ballyshannon), his present of fifty beeves to the victorious Bagenal on this occasion, his arrangements meantime to hire gallowglasses from Scotland. All these actions certainly indicate a man clever and mature beyond his years (about nineteen), a man who could see, as clearly as O'Neill, that a conflict was inevitable, but who knew he needed time, desperately. To allow the conflict to develop now (1593) would be to invite disaster.'

Morwenna Donnelly, writing in her article, 'Red Hugh at Dundalk,' Donegal Annual 1957, has this to say -

'Men of genius are never simple and any statement of Red Hugh which seeks to imply that a dynamic temperament was not under control of a keen and realistic mind, is a superficial one. Within eighteen months, young and totally inexperienced, he had radically changed the situation in West Ulster; what he effected could only have been accomplished by a highly disciplined man with balanced judgment. An unstable, hot-head, even under the influence of a much older and more experienced man, could hardly have survived a month in the Tirconnell quicksand.'

From the many letters and documents in the Spanish archives we learn that Aodh Rua spent quite alot of time during '93 petitioning for Spanish aid and encouraging the Gaelic Chieftains to unite against the English.

Sean O'Donnell(*) states that Aodh Rua 'was the central figure in Ireland around which plans for a war with Spanish aid were to be launched. The plan of that war was not confined to Tir Chonaill or Ulster, it embraced the four provinces.' O'Neill, at this time, made every effort to have it believed by everyone, with a few exceptions, that he was loyal to the Crown. By April, the English in Dublin were worried as they had neither the man-power nor the money to withstand, as they said, 'The fury of the Spaniards.' Reports arrived almost daily of fleets being prepared in Spanish and Portuguese ports to take troops to Ireland, while spies reported of Ulster Chieftains swearing loyalty to the confederate cause and hiring gallowglasses from Scotland. Most of the same Chieftains had at some time during the previous few years offered their submission to Dublin and had been pardoned and promised protection. But no one was being fooled. The Irish were buying time to make their preparations while the Dublin officials, fearing Spanish intervention, thought it prudent not to incite hostilities.

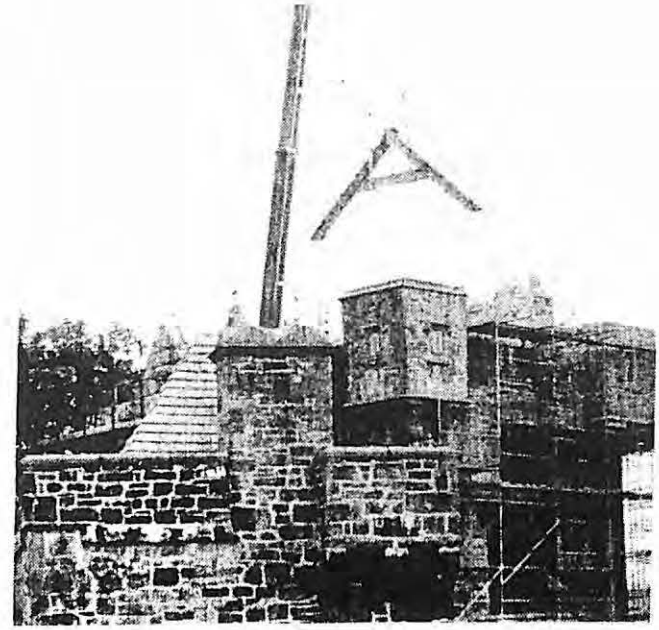
Maguire of Fermanagh was the only exception. Though he had joined the confederates and given his oath of allegiance, and had also submitted and was pardoned by the Lord Deputy, yet he continued to cause much trouble to the English. Finally, on the 10th October, an English force under the command of Marshall Sir Henry Bagenal moved against him. They met at Ath Cul Uain on the Erne near Beleek. Maguire's forces were put to flight and in the pursuit 340 of them were killed. Maguire himself escaped, with a handful of men, to his castle at Enniskillen. O'Neill fought with the English that day and received a leg wound which we are told (by O Clerigh) delighted him as it should cause the English not to have any suspicion of him. O'Neill had no intention, nor O'Donnell either, of taking part in a general war until the arrival of the Spaniards and until they were satisfied the time was ripe, but 1593 was drawing to a close with no sign of Spaniards. Eventually, when they did take the field it was not because the time was ripe but being forced to do so by circumstances.

* Sean O'Donnell of Creeslough, Co. Donegal produced a very detailed history(unpublished) of the O'Donnell Clan as his thesis for a Ph.D. degree.

Castle Repairs.

The restoration work continues on the O'Donnell castle, Donegal Town. The top of the walls had to be rebuilt to take the timber trusses that will support the roof. The timber began to arrive last summer, four hundred tons of Irish oak, having already been prepared in the Board of Public Works' depot in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim. I watched one day as two men with sledge hammers and crowbars inched the mortice & tenon joints together on the ground.

A few days later the trusses were hoisted into place by crane - I wondered how it was done in 1474 when first roofed. Indeed, this is the third roof. Before Red Hugh departed Tirconnel in 1601 he had the roof removed to render the castle useless to the English. But



after his death in 1602 it was re-roofed by either his brother, Rory, or Sir Basil Brook, Lord Brookborough, who got possession of it under the Plantation of Ulster 1609. It is ironic that the oak being used now was grown on the present Brookborough estate, Co. Fermanagh.

When all the roofing-timber is in place,(and it will be timber only, no metal nails, bolts or brackets will be used), slabs of Meenaneery stone will be used to cover it, I am told.

Last year the right-hand turret was rebuilt to match the existing one on the left but then it was noticed that the latter(see front cover ODA No. 10) was not 100% safe so it was removed stone by stone and rebuilt.

While I applaud the great work being done to this, out greatest O'Donnell relic, yet I feel it a pity that it is being restored to its former English style rather than its original Irish style.

V. O'Donnell.

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Archbishop Patrick Mary O'Donnell.

Patrick M. O'Donnell was the son of a farmer, Thomas O'Donnell of Fethard, Co. Tipperary and was the youngest of a family of sixteen. He was born in 1897 and received his early education, firstly, from the Presentation Sisters, secondly, from the Patrician Brothers. He, then, moved to Limerick where he was taught by the Jesuit Fathers and afterwards spent a short while in All Hallows College, Dublin. From this stay in Dublin Patrick had vivid memories of the Easter Rising of 1916 and met several of the leaders, John Redmond, Thomas Ashe, Sean T. O'Kelly, to mention but a few.

Patrick then continued his studies in Rome where he was ordained by Cardinal Pompili, Vicar General to the Pope, on 15th April 1922. At the end of June the now Dr. O'Donnell returned to Ireland before taking up his post in Australia. His departure from Ireland was complicated by the Irish Civil War of 1922, as internal communications were greatly disrupted. Dr. O'Donnell approached the commander of the Republican troops in his home area, Eamonn de Valera, who soon secured his ticket for him. From this incident a strong, lasting friendship developed.

Upon his arrival in Australia in late October 1922, Dr. O'Donnell took up duty in the Diocese of Sale, where he served under Bishop Phelan, a family friend. He fulfilled the duties of curate at the Sale Cathedral 1922-30, Administrator of the Cathedral 1930-37, and became Parish Priest of Leongatha, South Gippsland in 1937. In 1941 he was appointed Vicar General of the Diocese and in 1944 Pope Pius XII created him a Domestic Prelate. In 1946 he was promoted to Monsignor and appointed as Parish Priest of Warragul, Victoria. Three years later on St. Patrick's Day 1949 he was consecrated Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane by His Eminence, Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney. After the death of Archbishop Duhig in April 1965, Patrick Mary O'Donnell assumed his right of accession as the third Archbishop of Brisbane. His 16 years as Coadjutor gave him an intimate knowledge of the complexities of running the Archdiocese.

It is significant that his appointment was made at a time when the Church in Australia was emerging from its strong

identification with Irish issues and was intent on developing its own identity. The fact that the appointment came some 20 years after the Vatican began promoting the policy of Australian-born clergy, emphasises the exceptional nature of Dr. O'Donnell's selection. It was also a significant tribute to his talents, popularity and acceptability. He was the last Irish-born bishop appointed in Australia.

Archbishop O'Donnell always involved himself busily with the affairs of the Archdiocese. His energies were used in modernising and extending educational facilities and religious institutions. He was to the forefront in promoting ecumenism and was instrumental in breaking down many barriers between Catholics and other Christians. He wholeheartedly implemented the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council in the mid-sixties.

In 1954 he led a pilgrimage to Rome, Lourdes and Ireland visiting many Marian shrines. They were warmly welcomed by the Bishops and people of Cork and Kerry during their visit there. The Archbishop, of course, also visited his native home. He, again, visited Ireland in 1961 when he represented the Australian Bishops at the commemoration of the 1500th anniversary of the death of St. Patrick.

At his Golden Jubilee Mass in 1972 the following message from Pope Paul VI was read, "For you it has been a long journey full of hard work. By your zeal, dedication and prudent wisdom, you have ensured that the house of God is solidly built in Brisbane. Now you can pause for a moment as one who has come into harbour and look back on the course of your life."

On March of the following year he retired from his position. By this time he had been a member of the Catholic hierarchy for almost 25 years and was one of the most senior and highly-regarded churchmen in Australia. He had the reputation of a great churchman, historian, litterateur and, in the best of Irish traditions, a great story-teller. He was honoured in the Catholic newspaper, The Catholic Leader, in 1979 where he was described as a distinguished Irishman, with outstanding personal qualities and a churchman of high scholarship, spirituality and apostolic zeal, another example of the many Irish, both lay and religious, who had made such an enormous contribution to the Church in Australia.

Archbishop O'Donnell died on 2nd November 1980 and was interred at St. Stephen's Cathedral, Brisbane. A few hours after he was laid to rest on the 6th November, Requiem Mass was concelebrated in his native Fethard.

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The above is a synopsis of an article submitted by John Dale, Queensland, a long-time subscriber to this Newsletter. V. O'Donnell.

THE O'DONNELLS AND THEIR HERALDRY

A Talk given by Patrick O'Kelly de Conejera at the 1980 O'Donnell Clan Gathering in Donegal Town.

Introduction

Tradition has it that St. Patrick himself inscribed the Cross on the shield of the O'Donnell's ancestral Chief with the words, 'In this sign conquer', and considering the background involved this can not easily be dismissed as a romantic fable.

Succeeding his father as commander in Roman Britain in 306, and proclaimed Emperor by his troops, St. Constantine had a vision of the Cross with the words, 'In this sign conquer' on the eve of his greatest battle in Italy. The vision may be questioned but his use of the Cross and these words is established, and his victory led him to the Holy Throne of Constantinople, from where he raised the persecuted Church to become the official religion of the Empire.

If St. Patrick was born in Roman Britain around 385, the son of a Deacon and grandson of a priest, he would surely have known of St. Constantine and revered him for the greatest service to the Christian faith since the time of the Apostles. Brought up within this tradition, it is logical that St. Patrick would have used it in his conversion of an Irish warrior Chief.

The use of tribal symbols whereby a cross might be borne on a shield or banner was common to most early peoples, including the Celts and Anglo-Saxons, but the Irish Clans retained the continuity of their organisation and their symbols free from the Roman occupation which broke that of the Anglo-Saxons.

The evolution of these Clan symbols into heraldic form is evident throughout our ancient manuscripts, such as the Book of Leinster, which records the Golden Lion on the Green Banner of Congal in 634. Thus, by the 12th and 13th centuries, when the Clans remained in full force, the development of heraldry in Europe as a whole influenced the style of their Arms, but did not represent an innovation as in other countries.

This continuity of heraldic tradition is possibly unique to Ireland, arising from our isolation, and the retention of our native social structures until a comparatively late date. It is all the more unfortunate therefore, that so many who profess to support our own traditions should fail to do so in the field of heraldry.

The problem may lie in misunderstanding, since our Clans had a different social structure to that which arose from the lands of the old Roman Empire, and used heraldry for a different purpose. To foster the Irish heraldic tradition as we should, therefore, we must first understand its different roots and the manner in which they have merged into the heraldry of today.

The Nature of Clan Society

The Clan was essentially a collective body of five primary classes; the first three of which were Kings, Nobles and Freeborn with substantial property. They were all styled as Aires or privileged people, and had some part in the Clan administration.

The fourth class were the Freeborn with little or no property, forming the bulk of the Clan; but all the Freeborn were styled as Urrad, related to the German Uradel meaning original Nobleese, with specific rights and responsibilities in accordance with the Brehon Law.

The fifth class were the Unfree, including some of the Clan name, adopted strangers and slaves. They had few, if any, rights, hence the Clan name does not necessarily convey all the Clan rights.

Relationships between the Clans followed similar principles, each Clan being autonomous, with the Chiefs of the lesser owing allegiance to those of the greater, often with a basis of common descent and hereditary rights; and in turn the greater Chiefs owed allegiance to those still higher.

The ancient designation of all these Chiefs as Kings has obscured the fact that the highest represented, and still represent Royal Lines comparable with any in Europe, while the lowest might be compared with the Ruling Counts of the Continent since they all had a degree of autonomy beyond that of the European Lordships.

Never-the-less, all the Irish Chiefs were essentially the leading member of their Clan, as an extended family group in which all the Freeborn had at least a theoretical relationship, and specific rights and responsibilities within the Brehon Law by which they were governed.

Against this background the whole purpose of Clan Arms was to identify the Clan and represent its collective power and authority to outsiders: normally with a banner comparable to a National Flag. Authority within the Clan did not need any heraldic identification, as this was obvious in the golden ornaments of the Nobles and the colours of dress, and it would only have lost the collective protection of the Clan Arms.

The Continental Background

Where the Irish Kings belonged to their Clan as their leading member, the early Kings and Princes of the Continent were, in effect, the personal owners of their lands and their people, and a class if not a race apart; with their Nobility as subordinate rulers in the same pattern.

The purpose of their arms, arising in the 12th century, was to represent their personal authority, to be passed to their eldest son with that authority on their death. Younger sons had to difference their arms to show their membership of the Royal or Noble House concerned, with an authority subject to that of its head.

The Laws of Heraldry

It is from this basis of arms as a personal right, to which only one person could be entitled at any one time, that the laws of heraldry developed over subsequent centuries. Among many other factors these laws dealt with the colours and charges on a shield or banner for artistic effect and ease of identification, and the marshalling of different arms on one shield to show inheritance of different rights; and since ownership of property could rest on the validity of an armorial Seal they were of considerable practical importance.

The development of these laws over the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries had little relation to Clan Arms, which had evolved from primitive symbolism with a continuity lacking in countries subjected to Roman occupation, and which served the purpose of the Clan for as long as it retained its collective nature and power. It may be that Clan Arms evolved in the style and colours of continental heraldry over this period, however, and the brown Banners referred to in our ancient manuscripts were replaced by the more effective heraldic red.

To be continued in next issue.